THE Final Straw

A WEEKLY ANARCHIST SHOW

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ANDREW LEE ON DEFYING DISPLACEMENT

THE FINAL STRAW RADIO - FEBRUARY 11, 2024

for putting out this book. I really appreciate it.

AL: Thank you so much for having me.

hood or you don't, and you wouldn't want folks who don't live in a neighborhood calling the shots. But I do think there's power in pulling together folks who can work in solidarity with the folks living somewhere, who are also interested in building movement infrastructure for the next fight. For that to happen, it needs to be a self-aware movement, that's class-conscious, and that can build power across communities and across these divides because who knows what the next neighborhood that gets targeted for intensive capital reinvestment is or what the characteristics are of the folks who live there.

TFSR: A helpful thing about your book was pointing out that in a lot of these communities that are resisting displacement, this isn't their first rodeo, even if the current generations aren't the ones who had fought against it. There's a long history of community organizing in different geographic locations and among lots of different populations to resist this displacement, even if it looks a little different or the characters are different. With the various steps of displacement that have occurred in Black Bottom, like the renaming of the community, and the expansion of the university into it. Even if one campaign ends, and you have to swivel to another, oftentimes, it's a lot of the same companies that are involved in the investment and the displacement. Well, thank you so much, Andrew, for this conversation. I've really enjoyed it. I'll link in the show notes to some of the projects that you've named. Are there any other projects or thinkers on the subject that you would want to direct listeners to? I saw that you were doing at least one presentation on the book, and I'm not sure exactly when this will come out. But do you have a tour plan for it?

A: I'm working on tour stuff now. If you have any ideas of places I could go, please let me know because I don't really know what I'm doing. You can go to my website xAndrewLeex.com. I have a mailing list up there. It's also my handle for IG and TikTok. I'll put announcements there.

Oh, I want to shout out Decolonize Philly **@decolonizephilly** on IG. Keyssh Datts is doing really great work in terms of building movement capacity, bringing movements together, bringing folks out of the silos that we're in because of our campaigns, and building these really productive spaces where folks across movements and across causes and communities can come together and orient their work towards land liberation in Philadelphia.

TFSR: Thank you very much. If I get any ideas or if you have a thing in your head of places you want to go, I'd be happy to help you think through those. But that's for off-mic. Thanks again for having the conversation and

We're sharing a recent chat with Andrew Lee (instagram / tiktok), author of the book *Defying Displacement: Urban Recomposition and Social War*, released by AK Press on February 6th 2024. Andrew and I talk about gentrification, speculation and financialization of houses, the destruction of communities by racial capitalism and the state, and some methods used to fight back and stay put. Andrew shouts out Decolonize Philly as a project to pay attention to.

Andrew on TikTok: **@xandrewleex**
Instagram: @**xandrewleex**
Decolonize Philly: **@decolonizephilly**

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TFSR: I'm joined by Andrew Lee, author of the book *Defying Displacement: Urban Recomposition and Social War*, which will be out of AK Press on February 6th, 2024. Congrats on the book. Thank you for joining me for the chat. Would you mind telling us your correct gender pronouns, location, or other information that the audience might find helpful to know you?

Andrew Lee: Sure. My name's Andrew, I use he/him pronouns. I live and organize in Philly, and I used to live and organize in San Jose in the San Francisco Bay Area.

TFSR: Can you talk a bit about what got you writing and thinking and fighting around issues of displacement?

AL: This book really came out of my work in grassroots movements against displacement, which I've been involved with, alongside other folks, for several years now. There are movements against gentrification that are really taking center stage in movement spaces in cities, not only across the country but around the world. Under this is a huge social process, the transformation of urban areas, and the expulsion of the remnants of the urban working class of color. I started thinking about the issues that I raised in this book and tried to dig deeper into the social process behind gentrification because there's something really novel happening in contemporary capitalism that these movements are grappling directly with. There are a few reasons why it can be hard to see what's new in this process because gentrification depends on exploitation and income inequality, which is very old, and white supremacy and racism, which is also very old. And of course, displacement itself isn't new. The communities that are getting displaced by gentrification today have suffered double or triple displacements before because these are communities of color. These are ethnic enclaves of folks who were displaced through slavery, genocide, through imperialist wars and have landed in these urban communities, and now they're getting displaced once again. None of these things are new, and it can look like it's just more of the same, which from one perspective, it is. But what is interesting about gentrification is that we're in a new period, especially in the United States, where pricing out working-class people from cities is profitable for the richest people and institutions. That is something that we haven't seen before. It's leading to a wholesale transformation of the composition of cities based on a transformation in the way that value is captured in contemporary capitalism.

TFSR: I like how in your book, while bringing in stories of people's experiences of having their communities ripped apart by capitalist processes, you also go into a systematic approach to gentrification, because I've definitely

One of the things that's really encouraging is how little that [race-baiting] has worked. People in our struggles, both to protect Black residents in West Philly in the Peoples Townhomes and the community in Chinatown, this is the same struggle, this is the same fight. These are two fronts in the multiracial movement against displacement and against gentrification, and we are actively building and underlining those solidarities because that's how we're going to win. Because of the history of segregation, organizing between communities fighting displacement is often multiracial organizing, if it is not intercity organizing. Being conscious about the work that's required to get into that and the strategic possibilities that open up for our collective liberation, as we work through it, it's very crucial and something that community leaders organizers and fighters have put a lot of intention behind here in Philadelphia. This fight is still ongoing. If you're in the area, I would definitely encourage you to get involved.

TFSR: That's awesome. The point is pretty clear, too. Communities that are trying to resist these displacements, not that they posit it this way, but it's not a zero-sum situation if some of the same assholes with a lot of money are behind trying to put the Sixers stadium in one place and they're also trying to displace housing in another neighborhood across town. It makes a lot of sense to take those names and focus collaboratively to fight against their ventures. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about the Peoples Townhomes, the place where those are endangered, where those are based and rooted in the community that lives there.

AL: The Peoples Townhomes are in so-called University City, which was called the Black Bottom before it became targeted for intensive reinvestment and redevelopment by Drexel and the University of Pennsylvania in mid-century. This is one of the last large concentrations of residents in the Black Bottom, of Black folks from West Philly. They're trying to demolish them and create a research center or something because of a lot of biomedical stuff in Philly universities. That's also an ongoing fight. I know that folks continue to be in conversation with decision-makers. There was a long occupation in solidarity with them. There's been a lot of organizing coming out of the universities in solidarity with them as well. Many of those residents are just incredible leaders in movements in Philadelphia as a whole. That and Chinatown are where the fights are today. But the thing about these anti-displacement fights in the stage of struggle we're at today is that they're all time-limited. Either they build the arena, or they don't build the arena. In either case, the campaign is over. We need to think about ways that we can develop folks, develop our capacities, and develop our relationships in between fights so that we don't have to reinvent the wheel every time. It's hard because either you live in a neighbor-

town who are working in solidarity with residents to protect the neighborhood and to stop a proposed basketball arena that we know would have catastrophic effects on the neighborhood. Philadelphia's Chinatown, because it's located so close to the middle of the city, has been a target for displacement for many years. There is a proposed basketball stadium, there's a proposed casino, there's a proposed jail, and the community defeated all of those three proposals over the last several decades. There's a lot of community knowledge and relationships around resistance, community activism, and neighborhood defense. A freeway was built through the middle of Chinatown. They were unable to defeat it.

And the owners of the Philadelphia 76ers are by day billionaire real estate dudes. One of them is a CEO of a company that owns campus apartments. One of them is Senior Director of Strategic Operations at Blackstone, the largest renter on the planet. So their fun side hustle is owning the 76ers. These are all guys who personally benefit from the displacement of Chinatown. Their narrative is like "Oh, you idiots, you big morons, we aren't gonna build the arena in Chinatown. We're gonna build it next to, directly adjacent to Chinatown. Everyone's going to be fine." That's what happened in DC, they built the Capital One arena not on top of but directly adjacent to DC's Chinatown. Within six years, 90% of people got priced out. You go there today, there's the arch. The signs are translated for diversity or whatever. But there's no community, there's no Asian people in Chinatown anymore. That's what would happen. We saw what would happen. We are a two-hour drive from where the same thing happened. We know exactly what would happen if this came in. There will be such a great financial incentive for all of the land around a stadium to be acquired for businesses serving the arena: parking lots, hotels. It would be very hard to access because of all the traffic, so all the restaurants and businesses would die. We know exactly what would happen. This community has fought developments like this off many times before. We are supporting folks with a lot of collective and inter-generational knowledge. We're fighting people who are at a different scale of capitalist devilry, like global finance capital shenanigans. That's where we're at with the fight in Chinatown. The Philadelphia 76ers are trying to ignite a race war in Philadelphia. I never thought I'd be able to say that sentence but it's true. They have this really slimy PR campaign where after a year of opposition to the arena, they had this big announcement where they're like "We're gonna have 40% of the concessions of vendors in the arena Black-owned because we love diversity, and the ethnic cleansing of Chinatown will be great for racial justice." Philly's 42% Black, so they're literally promising less under-representation. Also, they are the current owners of the Sixers. So if they really cared about this, which they didn't, they could have advocated for that at the arena where they currently play. A very blatant attempt at race-baiting because of the massive opposition to this arena.

lived in communities where gentrification is the white punk household, or the artists moving in down the street, or where people point to the specific business that moves in that is the gentrification, or rightly pointing to increased policing that occurs as white folks move in, or as specialty businesses move into a neighborhood, but saying that it's not just those things, that those are harbingers. Anyway, gentrification feels like a messy thing to talk about. So I wonder if you could break down what the process, in your understanding, of gentrification is, particularly in the current tech reinvestment in cities and the re-displacement of communities of color.

AL: It does. Those two examples are very common examples of gentrification discourse: the white punk house and the hipster bakery. Those are part of the process of gentrification. But if that's where our analysis ends, we lose so much. We lose really important opportunities to understand and combat this much broader social process. A lot of our discourse about gentrification is from the perspective of someone who may or may not be a gentrifier. I moved to this neighborhood, am I a gentrifier, if I am a person of color, or if I'm queer, or if I grew up in a similar neighborhood? And that's where our thinking about gentrification starts and stops in a lot of narratives and conversations. What that does is it limits the anti-gentrification fight to the feelings of a potential gentrifier. Then it's just about someone's guilt or lack of guilt. What we're really talking about is ethical consumerism. Where is it ethical for me to consume a unit of housing? Is it more ethical for me to consume this product from a coop, as opposed to Walmart? And, of course, those things in both of those cases are significant. But we know that if our political analysis ends there, it's self-defeating because it remains within the confines of market decisions. It doesn't allow us to tackle the broader structures within which people are making consumer choices.

Part of this is that gentrification can be a really loosely defined word. Sometimes people use it to just mean a capital improvement in a neighborhood. From that, you have people writing think pieces about "Oh, is gentrification, good or bad? Can you have gentrification without displacement?" That's just muddying the waters. If you have an affluent community of well-off homeowners who improve their properties all at once, or get new streetlights, or have the sidewalk replaced, no one calls that gentrification. Gentrification isn't just physical improvements to a neighborhood. It is displacement. Gentrification is inherently about displacement. It's about displacement for profit.

The communities that are getting gentrified, a generation or two ago, were largely working in manufacturing assembly here in Philly Textiles. You couldn't own a factory or a sweatshop if you don't pay your workers enough to live next to it. It doesn't mean that these communities were paradises. It doesn't mean they

weren't severely dis-invested and repressed in a very intentional process, starting from the federal government, over decades. However, there was a financial incentive for the capitalist class to have those workers there so they could go to work. Those jobs in those industries no longer exist. The industries that exist in urban cores today, in the United States, but around the world too, are tech, biotech, finance, real estate, the universities, the elite universities that train people to work in those fields, the tourist developments are to entertain those same class of folks when they're on vacation. These are industries—tech, finance, real estate—that don't require huge quantities of workers like assembly lines did. You have a small section of workers and owners who are getting paid enough to gentrify and people who would have composed the urban working class are now paid so little that their neighborhoods are gentrifi-able.

TFSR: There are significant portions of the book with a focus on failed approaches to resolve displacement from a community standpoint, such as approaches to para-governmental preservation, such as through UNESCO, voting in progressive politicians to city council, requirements on certain percentages of "affordable housing units" per development, or reliance on the goodwill of NGOs or nonprofits to keep development or redevelopment within some limit, some reasonable rate that doesn't threaten the integrity of the community. I wonder if you could talk about some of these approaches. If we're saying that capital and the people that administer capital—obviously it's under the guise of a "free market"—but there are governmental agencies and nonprofits and such that helped to define the goals of capital development and profitability that decide what a neighborhood should look like and partially based, as you say, on what the needs of accumulation of capital through workers are in an area. I wonder if you could talk about some of these approaches toward resolving the development of neighborhoods and the displacement of communities.

AL: There are so many interventions from politicians, NGOs, gentrifying corporations, and universities themselves that operate as if gentrification were an automatic natural process outside of human control that we're just trying to respond to. Like it's an earthquake, the earthquake happened, it's nobody's fault, there's going to be more earthquakes in the future, all we can do is pitch in and try to remedy the effects and prepare better for the next one. That is not what gentrification is at all. If you look at what these people are saying to one another, a very different picture emerges. People who are involved in urban planning, municipal policies, and those fields, have a positive and negative example of what you want your city to look like. The negative example is post-Great-Recession Detroit: capital flight, white flight,

was. Now a lot of people at least heard the word. They're familiar with the concept, but they may not know what it looks they may not know what organizing one entails, and they may not quite know what being a member of a specific one would be like as a worker, but people are familiar. And there is a level of legal protection for concerted activity under the National Labor Relations Board. It's not great. We all know that. But there is a mechanism where you can get reinstated, you can get back pay, your boss has to put up a stupid poster (at least) in the workplace, because you have some legal protections at organizing at work, and you don't have those for organizing to defend your home. Of course, the only reason we have those minimum legal protections at work is because people fought and bled and died for generations organizing at work. But we're on untested ground here, especially because these institutional landlords didn't exist 20 years ago, There wasn't a rental market for single-family homes until the Great Recession wiped out 47% of Black household wealth and private equity firms stole a bunch of houses. It wasn't a commodity that existed. Now it does. There wasn't an equivalent to Blackstone 50 years ago, at the scale we're talking about now. This is new, the financialization of real estate, which only means that housing units are being treated as commodities, not just by a landlord or your local regional bank, but by these transnational corporations. This is all very new. Any experimentation or attempts we can do to bring our struggles together, to bring our neighborhoods in the struggle together, to support each other and have that strategic creativity as we try to figure out how to leverage the power that we have is important, is useful, is where we should be intervening. My only proviso is that it's for real. We are talking about the survival or obliteration of communities of parents and grandparents and children. We're talking about the ability of folks to hold on to their culture, to hold on to their social selves, to not die of exposure, to not be exposed to unrestricted police violence. We're talking about things for real, real flesh-and-blood people whose way of life is either going to be insured for the next generation or wiped from the face of the earth. As we are trying to figure this out, we just need to understand the real human stakes in this because they are high.

TFSR: Thank you for that thoughtful answer. I was wondering if we could go back to Philadelphia's Chinatown that you were discussing. Can you talk a bit about the struggles against the destruction of Chinatown by the building of this basketball stadium and a bit about Chinatown, its composition, who lives there, and some of what is feared would be lost if this stadium and the world that it brings would be built?

AL: Yeah, I'm a member of No Arena in Chinatown Solidarity, **@NACSPhilly** on Instagram. We're a group of folks who predominantly don't live or work in China-

of their neighbors. I don't know if you've worked with tenant unions or not, but I wonder what your take on that model is.

AL: I didn't really dive into it that much because it's not something that I have a lot of personal experience with, but I do have folks who work in tenants' unions, and I know that there have been real victories coming out of that model. All the things we're working with, at this state of anti-displacement fight, we're trying to figure out what works, what's going to be the most impactful against these huge corporations and private equity firms and transnational institutions. As somebody who also has experience with labor organizing, I do think the big thing for housing or labor organizing in general is to take it seriously. Take it seriously, because otherwise, you're just messing around with people's lives. It's one thing to be like "Oh, come to this event, come to this protest." But if people are risking eviction or termination, having good politics isn't enough, you have to be in it to win it. You got to be in it to support people, and you got to show real solidarity and not leave folks hanging. That's for any community work, but just especially for stuff around people's homes, especially knowing how hard it is, once you have an eviction on your record, how hard it is to get stable housing after you haven't had it, how much folks are already dealing with. People have to take it seriously and be prepared for the responsibility that taking that risk involves for them and for other folks. But tenants unions had a moment with COVID. That's an important component in figuring out how we're going to win this thing.

TFSR: It's the point of reproduction or the point of production, the level of investment, if you're actually getting to know your neighbors. This is your point of where capital is extracting from you that you have in common with them. It also does seem to provide an opportunity for—I know that there are wider networks of these tenants unions, maybe a national network in the US—an opportunity to focus on, obviously, the residence of various properties that are owned by the same financial institutions in one city, let alone possibly in other states in the so-called US could collaborate around policies within that corporation of how they deal with tenants, how much money they take beforehand, what requirements they have on who can rent from them. It seems an opportunity for bridging that geographic division if people do it right.

AL: Absolutely. That's the kind of configurations that could have a lot of promise. The challenge is that we don't have models for that. Until very recently, one of the challenges with labor organizing is most people had never heard of labor unions. Huge swathes of the country just had no conception of what being in a labor union

decreasing population, there's no money to do anything. We all, as local political elites, would hate for that to be our city. The positive example is a place like Austin, or Silicon Valley, or San Francisco, where you have all of these very rich corporations, there's a lot of investment, people are flocking to them. A lot of urban planning is about how to engineer your city so it's more like San Jose than Detroit. The thing that is important here is that San Jose is also a post-industrial city, just like Detroit. San Jose used to have microchip factories before they were outsourced. The area was urbanized for microchip assembly line workers, and all those jobs disappeared. The only reason why that area didn't have the same issues as post-Great-Recession Detroit is because tech R&D and investment took over the area. Which is to say the difference is gentrification. The difference is these corporations that are attracting highly paid workers and expelling everyone else.

Gentrification is a positive policy outcome that is highly desirable to state and financial elites. Gentrification is something that is sought after and constructed by the state. It's one of the chief things that local elites are looking to inspire because that's the economic configuration in which we're in. The industries that can capture the most value are the ones that are paying this relatively small section of the working class enough to gentrify. So any of these interventions are predicated on the idea that displacement is just happening, and we're all doing our best to take care of it, hey are lies. They're built on lies. Maybe not all of these people have the intellectual honesty to admit to themselves what they're doing, but they are aiming to create gentrification. They are actively creating gentrification through tax havens, through zoning, and through all sorts of mechanisms. However local municipal elites are desperately looking for gentrification. The corporations want to create hubs of their educated workers, which is what the San Francisco Bay Area provides for tech firms. People go there and you can work at different tech firms. You can work at a startup, you can work at a Big Five, like Google, and you can bounce around. There's an educated workforce with the required skills, and there are coding boot camps to feed people into that. There's the venture capital firms, you can go talk to someone in person, and you have the conversion of more and more of the cities into areas that are designed to be appealing for this type of worker. That's where you get the coffee shop and the yoga studio. That's a good job perk. If I moved to the city to work for this company, I get to go out to this commercial district with my millionaire friends. For the companies that are creating gentrification, it's also a positive outcome that their financial growth depends on. If gentrification didn't happen, they would have to pay their workers more to absorb those housing costs so that it could.

A lot of fights around displacement, because it is so produced by the state, a lot of local movements have to engage with municipal politics or are affected by municipal politics on some level. I understand that there have been local politicians

who have taken better or worse stances regarding public pressure from the outside. I'm not one to write off a movement because they decide to ask a politician to not ethnic cleanse them quite so fast, That's not really my place. But I do think that there are limitations if we're looking at electoral politics at the local level as the thing that will stop displacement, that will end gentrification. There needs to be an extra-political, extra-legal force for two reasons. First, as I said, this is the way to run a functional city government under what has been called the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the knowledge economy, the new economy, that could just as easily be called the gentrification economy. Cities that don't gentrify, don't have money. Cities that do denitrify do. If you are a politician of any stripe, the rational thing for you to do over the long term is to support gentrification. If we're going to push outside that, which we must, there are real limitations about depending on a council member to try to stem that tide.

The other thing about gentrification is that the people who are most negatively affected by gentrification are, of course, the people who get displaced. If we're talking about local municipal government, that means that they are not that politician's constituents anymore. The people who benefit the most from gentrification are new arrivals, those are the people who become that politician's constituent. We also know that participation in voting correlates with wealth and education level. The people who are moving in are already more inclined to waste their time voting than the people who are getting pushed out. Just because of the structure of what local government is, and the fact that gentrification involves getting removed from a local area, they're getting new constituents. That's what this process is, they're getting new constituents, who are the beneficiaries of displacement. The people who were attacked by these political decisions, there's no longer any mechanism for accountability.

TFSR: I'd like to talk a little bit about what displacement looks like. There are examples of somebody's experience in their household or in their neighborhood of increasing cost of living, decreasing availability of employment, and increasing policing. But it's interesting to look at shifts, at least in the way that the populations have been moved around by racial capitalism. Looking at, say, back in the post-World War II era, folks had moved in a lot of cases to where jobs were or where relatives, friends, or other communities were, around job centers and around factories. As de-industrialization occurs, white flight occurs, and a lot of white middle and upper-class folks move out of the cities into the suburbs, which brings a lot of the tax base with it. Industries simultaneously are moving factories to less urban, less unionized areas, and then eventually out of the country in a lot of cases. There are some global dynamics to this. It's not just about those specific

least a healthy suspicion of politicians and nonprofit foundations as being the silver bullet that will save you. So communities are doing a form of anarchism in that sense, no matter how folks would identify their political beliefs ideologically. I'm not saying that all the politics coming out of any community are good, because they certainly aren't, but that for communities to have lived this long and to continue, especially into the future, requires an anarchism of praxis. So that when we're engaging with folks, it's not about teaching people Bakunin quotes or something. It's not about bringing knowledge to communities that are in resistance. We're working towards the forms of resistance and revolt and liberatory practice we can co-create based on the experiences and aspirations of communities in struggle. Anarchism, just like Leninism, democratic socialism, came from the 3rd Industrial Revolution. The idea is that we're all going to form federated workplaces and then go out in the general strike and that will be the revolution. That is an idea that made sense in the late 19th century when you had these huge concentrations of militant workers, but pointing to that as a formula under the radically different material conditions we have today is just as inappropriate as demanding some fidelity to theories that were worked out in 1917 Russia or early 20th century sewer socialism. That's what we need to repeat with our friends, with our neighbors. Looking at the actual struggles that exist today, how can we point ourselves toward emancipation, liberation, and abolition? That's the task that's in front of us.

TFSR: Yeah, so get them corpses out of your mouth, y'all. Those points are really well taken and expressed. You didn't talk about tenant unions in the book. I don't know if it's just because it's not a framework that you were working around through your work around displacement on both coasts, or if you had critiques of it, but I was wondering if because this was around the time of the beginning of the COVID pandemic, this was a way that people who were taken out of the productive economy, to some degree, subsidized maybe by Big Old Daddy Trump dollars. (God, I hate saying that.) There were a lot of people, obviously, in workplaces, and a lot of people died in workplaces, and a lot of those people were working-class people of color. But a lot of people were not in workplaces or found themselves interacting a lot more with the people who lived immediately around them. There was a big crisis that the US economy experienced where the leaching landlord classes needed to be subsidized in their leaching so that part of the economy wouldn't collapse somehow or they wouldn't revolt. Tenant unions seemed an interesting intercession into that situation, where more federal money was getting plunged into the pockets of landlords to keep them from mass evicting people, and for people to call for improvements in their immediate situation, or to stop the losing of parts of their community and the eviction

to think about class in a more sophisticated way, where our ideological frameworks from a century ago aren't impeding our ability to identify and intervene in the class dynamics we're participating in and that are around us.

TFSR: That's fair. That makes a lot of sense. Ongoing with critiques of the ways that leftists and anarchists might engage with the issue. In the final chapter "Notes on Practice," you warn against leftist and anarchist formations in struggle and advise "anarchism of praxis" as found among many communities already fighting displacement. I wonder what examples you can give about what you're warning against in these housing struggles, any specific tenants' unions or other models that you feel have failed time and again but are being re-implemented for ideological reasons.

AL: I have been organizing in anarchist anti-authoritarian spaces for over a decade. If it weren't for these spaces, I wouldn't be who I am today. I also think we need to have a hard look at anarchism as it exists in the United States, especially in the context of white supremacy. If you look at it historically, there were really two unconnected anarchisms in the United States. There was anarchism in the early 20th century, which was predominantly Eastern European workers up through the first Red Scare. Berkman, Goldman, all those folks, it was a mass militant working-class immigrant labor movement that folks came out of. And that movement was defeated, some of its remnants moved into the CP-USA during the 1930s, and a lot of folks got deported. The FBI won that one, credit where credit is due.

The anarchism of today, we can refer to the same folks, and we can be like "Oh, that essay was cool." But it's actually not a connected movement. Because that movement was cut off, and then a different movement coming out of predominantly white punk scenes emerged and looked back to those references. There's a publishing house or two bridging that gap. But there isn't really a lot. We actually have two different anarchist movements. Some of the subcultural features of US anarchism allowed it to survive to the present day, which is, of course, a valuable thing. But it's very different to have anarchism coming out of white subcultural movements and anarchism coming out of a broad-based immigrant labor struggle. That's what we need to grapple with. If folks are conscious revolutionaries, if folks are anarchists, first of all, you really should get involved in anti-displacement fights. It's some of the impactful, exciting work that's happening and some of the clearest fault lines that allow us to actually confront the top of the ruling class, in the places where we live, to draw them out and to fight them. Whenever we're doing work in the community, we have to have humility. We have to have respect. We got to work with folks. When I talk about the anarchism of praxis, I'm saying that for communities to resist displacement requires more than market mechanisms, it requires at

factory owners. Then we see this process now that communities that had been existing—a lot of them racialized communities—that have been living for generations in metropolitan cores are being forced out over the last few decades through redevelopment, including nonprofits and capital working with the government to use eminent domain to break down pre-existing communities, black and brown communities, to a large degree, to remake pockets to re-invite capital and some of those white communities that have moved out to the suburbs back in, pushing a lot of people out to the cores. You have a disinvestment in suburbs that now have large communities of people of color, as capital moves back into the inner cities. Is that a fair breakdown of how that dynamic looks from a wider scale? Or am I missing some pieces?

AL: Yes, I think that's right. I really want to hone in on the role of race here. When we look at investment in a neighborhood, reinvestment, incentivizing identification, if I'm an investor, I want to invest in a property that's going to grow in value the most, obviously. It's what geographer Neil Smith calls the rent gap, the current value of a property, the gap between that and what its future value could be. Neighborhoods with particularly low current values represent the largest potential growth. That's why middle-class neighborhoods aren't gentrifying. One of the largest determinants of land value in the United States is race. An equivalent house in an equivalent neighborhood, same conditions, same upkeep, and the same number of bedrooms, if one of those identical houses is in a white neighborhood, and the other house is in a black neighborhood, the white house is valued at $48,000 more than the house in the black neighborhood.

Let's think about displacement. If I'm investing in a black neighborhood, the only thing that would have to happen for me to see a $48,000 profit on my investment would be not new businesses coming in—although that's obviously an incentive—not the streets getting fixed, not a new bus line, nothing other than the changing racial composition of the neighborhood. If I can just get the tenants and all of their neighbors to be people of a different race, I make $48,000. Gentrification in the United States is deeply tied to race and white supremacy. It's tied in ways that go beyond the personal prejudices of an individual gentrifier, because of the deep racism in US society expressed in the housing market. There's a "rational incentive" for race-based displacement. Even if you as an investor, personally aren't bigoted, if the only thing you cared about would be making as much money as possible, and you had absolutely no thoughts about racial discrimination or anything, the thing you would do rationally, just for your own pocketbook, would be to invest in racial displacement. That's a huge component of displacement. It's one of the things that makes displacement so painful and damaging. These are communities where

despite repression, despite disinvestment, different communities, Black, brown, and immigrant communities, have carved out a little space, where they can have community, where they can have history, where they can have mutual recognition. When those places get destroyed, there's no plan B.

I'm part of the campaign in solidarity with the folks who live in Philadelphia's Chinatown to stop them from getting displaced by a proposed basketball arena. What I tell people is there's no plan B for Chinatown, and Chinatowns across the country has been obliterated by redevelopment in the last few decades. There's no second-tier slightly worse backup Chinatown that people are going to move to. If it's gone, at least for the foreseeable future, it's gone. Those communities get dispersed. Maybe there are pockets of folks in different places, certainly less dense, certainly less connected, certainly less history, but the community itself is destroyed. The streets are gonna stay there, maybe some of the buildings are going to stay there, but the actual flesh-and-blood people who make an area a neighborhood, that neighborhood, for all intents and purposes, ceases to exist. That's one of the most challenging things about gentrification. The communities that we are in are what give us our social identity. No matter what community subculture, or cultural group, we all want a place where we can be recognized for who we are, where we can recognize other people, where we can express our full social identities to people who will accept them with respect. Everyone wants that. Those spaces are what are getting destroyed by the process of gentrification, by the intersection of racial capitalism, the financialization of the housing market, and this new economy of large firms and universities trying to colonize inner city areas for capital accumulation. Still, we have people saying that gentrification could be good. There are people writing reports saying that gentrification does not exist and that it's maybe two places in the country where it's happening, that it's very rare, it's inconsequential. These are untrue. The problem is there's so little research being done tracking the number of people who get displaced from these communities. People talking about supposedly objective information, like the tax base is growing, the streets have more lights, the average income has gone up, all these supposedly objective universal facts against what gets framed as the misguided, selfish interests of a specific community in not getting wiped off the face of the earth.

TFSR: Yeah, and the example of the income levels are higher, the buying potential, the tax base, whatever. These are the people that you described before as the replacement people, these are the new constituents. It's not about bringing up the people that were already living in the community. It's good to remind folks that property ownership is one of the fundamental ways for inter-generational transfer of wealth, or accumulation of wealth, and for it to be passed down through people's families and thus through peo-

workers. The San Francisco Bay Area is being gentrified not because every gentrifier owns a startup, but because most people are the highly-paid employees of tech firms, people who work in software development, R&D.

The idea that workers have a commonality of interests, and that commonality of interests is the most important component of the class struggle, and that class struggle has the potential to change the world to the expression of the of universal interests of the proletarian class. That wasn't just an idea that dropped down from heaven. When the thinkers of the revolutionary left were doing their thing, they were all in the middle of the 3rd industrial revolution, the late 19th to early 20th century. It's not the Marxs and Bakunins thought of the idea of labor unions that then was passed around in pamphlets and workers were like "Oh, cool, yeah, let's do that." Worker revolts were happening, and people who were conscious revolutionaries were trying to think through support and intervene in the struggles that were already happening as a result of urbanization and as the result of the concentration of pools of oppressed workers in the same workplaces in the richest cities of their day. That's where that came from. It was the community of industrial workers taking collective action at the point of production, which was providing extreme strategic leverage that people were trying to recognize and think through. That's where every left-wing ideology we have today came from. They were the differences between forms of Leninist vanguardism, anarchism, and social democracy. These are essentially strategic differences about how to establish urban hegemony given the actual existing class conflicts of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Given that these things are happening, should we do propaganda of the deed? Should we form a Vanguard party? Should we vote for a socialist mayor?

But this is not the predominant fraction of the class struggle in the present day. The most conflictual relationships around class are about displacement and resistance to gentrification. That's what we need to attend to and orient ourselves around when we're thinking of intervening in struggle and looking at workers' interests. Some people use the category of worker in a way that actually steers us away from looking at the material conditions the possibility of struggle and the interest involved with different individuals, just by saying, "Oh, we're all workers." Sure. The undocumented farmworkers harvesting crops and a software engineer at Google making six figures one year out of college are both workers. Sure. The question is, do they have the same interests? Do they have a basis to fight aside one another? Whereas if I live in a gentrifying neighborhood as a member of a gentrifying community, maybe I have more interest in someone who isn't my coworker but is my neighbor. Maybe in a limited sense, I have interests in common with my employer, because I couldn't get a job speaking my language if my employer went out of business and the noble proletarian employees of Microsoft moved in. Those are some of the reasons why I use the term "social war." It is about class, but we need

reasonable than that? Who could possibly object to that legitimately very modest, very reasonable preference? But because there is so much money in the obliteration and removal of certain communities, it would require attacking the foundations of the private housing market in this country to stop this over the long term for the next generation, for the generation after that to move beyond the campaign we might be working on today or tomorrow. To actually get a lasting security and victory for our communities would require moving large swaths of land out of market control. There is a lot of power in that connection. It's being articulated very powerfully by so many of these movements against gentrification.

TFSR: Thank you. I'm curious about the use of the term "social war" in the title. Can you talk a bit about what it's doing there? Why do you feel that a more recognized term like "class war" wouldn't have sufficed, and how do you view the composition of antagonists in the struggle around displacement?

AL: I think I mean class war. But I also think that term has a lot of baggage, some of which I argue against in the book. There is a sense in which class war is used by some radicals to mean something like, "And then one day, we all come to work with our guns, and we start the class war." For a lot of folks outside certain milieus that seems ridiculous, especially because we have the most heavily armed working class in human history in the United States, and we are not the closest anyone has ever been to revolution. But if you look at the history of the term "class war," it comes from an early translation of the Communist Manifesto into English.

Just a brief aside here. The early translations of the Communist Manifesto are a goldmine for wonderful stuff. The line that the specter of communism is haunting Europe was originally translated as "the hobgoblin of communism is haunting Europe." The hobgoblin, like a little troll, like "I'm going to abolish the value form." That rocks.

But the class war was the first translation of the line that's like, "all of hitherto existing human history is the history of class struggle or class war." Class war, in that sense, isn't about something that we're advocating for. It's not like "Oh, today, there's no class war. But if I have enough radical reading groups, maybe there will be one next year." Class war is an analysis. It's an analysis of the fundamental antagonism in class society, and it's a recognition that those class relations are maintained through force, including physical force. Also when some people talk about class, in some senses, there's a lot of intellectual ideological baggage that leads some white radicals to gloss over the centrality of race and white supremacy in US class formation and society and obscures the actual fractures and dividing lines when we're looking at class struggle in the gentrification economy. A lot of gentrifiers are

ple's communities. So when there are systematic approaches towards divesting people, whether it be through the shenanigans that brought about the economic collapse in 2008, by focusing subprime mortgages towards black and brown consumers, or the deployment of eminent domain by cities and redevelopment agencies, this is a fundamental outcome of it, the continued disinvestment of already racialized and indigenous communities or working-class communities. What models of resistance to displacement have you seen successful in your work and study on the subject? What could success mean, in this instance, where the market economy continues to exist with the government backing it?

AL: There are so many communities around the world that are trying to grapple with this very question right now, of what successful resistance to displacement looks like, of what does victory really look like for our communities. We're in a place that might be analogous to what the worker's movement was in in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, where there were a lot of folks, a lot of spontaneous factory occupations, walkouts, union activity, and people were figuring out how to build out structures and theories around that because they saw that these struggles brought them directly into conflict with the most powerful forces in their global economy. So many workers today work in a very fragmented labor market. People work at small businesses, at "mom and pops" [businesses], you work as an independent contractor, you work in the informal economy. It's no longer me and a couple thousand of my closest friends at the Manchester factories. When a lot of these struggles kick-off, you aren't actually fighting the capitalist class, and a lot of times they just go out of business. The people who are being put into a confrontation with (to use a term of art) the "commanding heights of the contemporary economy," are movements against displacement.

I think that we can defeat these developments today. We have seen ample evidence that that is difficult but possible. Ultimately, moving forward, the horizon that we're building towards has to confront the housing market, or more precisely, the market in land, because it's not that buildings are being overvalued and speculated, it's the land they're sitting on that's been the target of financial speculation. Models like occupations, squats, and community land trusts are all ways of affecting the de-commodification of land, in the near term, effectively taking land and removing it from the private market by ensuring that it will remain under community control or in trust indefinitely, regardless of changes in use or occupancy. That's one thing that we can work towards today. We're building this out.

One thing that I keep coming back to is how interconnected all of these fights are. Because again, we're talking about a relatively small crew of very rich dudes, who are at the top of the same investment banks and real estate holding

companies and tech firms and universities. People who are in very different cities fighting displacement often end up fighting folks who are either connected or the literal same. We don't really have a model yet for what intercity or intercommunal solidarity looks like. Our models for that are either around models we got from the movements for national liberation, or international solidarity, or models that we got from the 3rd industrial revolution around worker solidarity. I don't know if we have that model yet for residents and neighborhoods fighting displacement to work in ways that are strategic and aligned and build class power. But I hope that that's where we're getting towards. Ultimately, we need to confront the housing market, the market, and land as the cause and reservoir of so much dispossession and displacement historically, but particularly in the present day. Even in a market economy, there are all sorts of things you don't have a legal market for. Love, heroin, people, nuclear bombs. Since we all need a place of land to stand upon, since we all should have a place to call our home, should land be a thing that is bought and sold? How can we orient our movements today to reclaim more and more territory so that we can have a place in the world?

TFSR: And that not just find a little corner to shove ourselves into but actually get to thrive in a community with people for a long time. Of the legalistic approaches that get talked about, land trusts are one, where there's a legal framework that has been created for this model. We'll see how that stands up to things like eminent domain or if the government, if the state and capital really want to break something like that, I'm sure they can. But it might just be a battle they haven't thought to fight yet. I haven't heard this brought up in the book, and we can skip this if you're not interested, but you did talk a bit about resistance to the Google campus in Berlin. When I had spoken to folks there a couple years ago about housing issues they had mentioned this model that's not dissimilar in some ways to the land trust model, but basically a collectively-run corporation that will help people purchase flats from the market. But the corporation owns something like 51% of it, and the individual gets loans to purchase the house so they can pay off that 49%. So they own 49% of it. If they sell it, it can't go back into the market, it goes back into that collectively-owned corporation so that it can be sold at or leased or whatever at a decreased rate to other individuals seeking housing. But I don't know that much about that model. That's how I recall it being described to me. It was coming up against a bunch of government regulatory issues in Germany. Have you heard of that or any other novel approaches towards, at least for the short term, collectivizing and de-marketizing property?

AL: I haven't heard of that specifically. It sounds pretty similar to how community land trusts work in the US in practice. Nothing is a silver bullet. The problem with land trusts is you still have to acquire properties, just like that coop model in Germany. If you're in a gentrifying city, market-rate housing is, of course, the whole problem. Sometimes you force someone to give it to you, and you have the campaign to acquire land. In the absence of that, you're looking for grant funders to acquire market-rate housing. There are obviously challenges with everything, especially because, as I've said, gentrification is such a highly desirable outcome for the most powerful people on the planet. But there are so many opportunities in the fact that it is the wealthiest, most powerful people on the planet who have a vested interest in urban displacement.

There's a lot of power that can come out of demands that may seem very modest. But if you really work through them, they require significant structural transformations. There's a lot of narrative and organizing power in that framing. This is what André Gorz called "non-reformist reforms." A lot of people use that term in electoralist, democratic socialist spaces. Unfortunately, none of them know what it actually means. People use it to talk about things like Medicare for All and use it to mean a pretty big reform. Like if a small reform is a normal reform, then a pretty big substantial reform is a non-reformist reform. Like if we're at zero and adjusting the tax rate by 1% is a 5, and socialism is a 100, then anything that is within the 40-60 range is a non-reformist reform. That's actually not the sense in which Gorz uses the term at all. Funnily enough, in his book, he actually mocks the idea that making healthcare more accessible could be called a non-reformist reform. That's pretty cool. But what he means is not a reform that's very substantial, or halfway to a large change, it means a reform that seems to be directed at the state, a thing that you're asking the state for. But if you're actually serious about it, the only way to accomplish it is by overturning state power and developing the class power of the oppressed.

There are a lot of radical social movements that have come out of things like this. What could be a more modest reform than I want to feel safe walking home at night, just as men do? Then if you start working on it, you're like "And that's why we have to abolish gender." Or I don't think that there should be structural inequalities left over from literal slavery, and Black men shouldn't be murdered by the police with impunity, so I guess we have to abolish America. Because these things are so deep, that seems a very non-crazy, normal thing to ask for, because these forms of oppression are so deeply rooted and so powerful, it would require deeply uprooting them. What could be a more modest demand than "I want to stay in my house? I want to stay in my house. I want to keep paying rent to my landlord at the same amount that I do today"? It's not even a reform, it's literally conservative because you're asking for things to stay the same. What could be more